



WHY MENTAL PREPARATION IS SO IMPORTANT ON DIRECTING OF ATHLETIC PERFORMANCE?

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Abstract:

Our research work has fixed as objective, to apprehend the report of mental preparation for athletic performance from a study of a population of Algerian athletes. Sports performance defined by Platonov, V.N (1984.) as being *"the maximum possibilities of an individual in a discipline at a given moment in its development"* involves several other determinants. And this definition has the interest to introduce *"the concept of threshold or level of performance"*, which are quantifiable, as defined by time, distance, power. In contrast, the physical appearance which is much easier to quantify and evaluate, it seemed more that random to define this 'process' that unites a sports result in the specific field of the individual mind. And for this, we are interested in our study, this pane, in the matter of the psychological variables that differentiate individuals between them and to, *"everything that distinguishes the champions of other normal individuals: differential psychology."* Durand, M. (1987). And we asked why mental preparation is so important in the realization of the sports performance? What are its methods, how to determine its effectiveness? The intervention of the psychologist through a descriptive language full observation taken upstream, and has designed to try to understand that which is expressed, by his actions, emotions and attitudes in a stressful environment and in its *"moments of great solitude."* In other words, we are trying to assign to this mental factor 'discriminating quality' so coveted by the athlete and his coach.

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1. The dimension psychological of the performance

Many researchers wondered what the psychological dimension influence performance, and for many of them, it is essential in the search for the balance between the body and the mind. *"The foundations of real scientific training are currently insufficient. » It is more appropriate to speak of a scientifically reasoned and statistically verified sports training approach. The contribution of psychoanalysis in the athletic field is still marginal"* Lebrin, F. (2004). In the majority of theories, "...stress and cognitive anxiety are considered important factors having an effect on attention capacity." Eysenck, M.W., & Calvo, M. G. (1992); *"or on attention strategies."* Masters, RSW (1992); Beilock, S.L. & Carr, T.H. (2001) .cites by Bernier, M. And al. (2009) We hear often athletes back on their victory by saying that *"everything went in the head. You can always compensate a small technical disabilities or physical with a mentally strong."* III (2013). In sports, *"stress develops a gap between perceived demand and perceived ability to cope."* Jones, J.G. (1990). *"Anxiety is defined as emotion felt, not pleasant, that comes from the cognitive processes."* Eysenck, M.W. (1992).

In high-level sport, can be grouped the factors influencing, performance and results, in several categories, it's called 'performance factors'. Indeed, the competitive performance is the result of optimum use of the different elements allowing the athletes to express themselves 100% of their capacity, *"the approach of the athlete and the coach will be to manage these generating stress and anxiety, sports situations by implementing strategies for narrowing the gap perceived between demands and resources or by seeking to reduce the level of cognitive anxiety and its interplay on the activation level."* Bernier, M. And al. (2009) The psychological aspect is considered as being the substrate determinant of performance in many sports, it brings together several factors at once as, self-confidence, motivation, stress management, concentration, and the ability to indulge themselves.

2. Psychological preparation and mental preparation

"Mental preparation is essentially centered on technical learning and strategies for the sport to progress and better manage its performance on mental, emotional and physical, but also better manage its environment. The psychological preparation, on the other hand, would take a depth and a different meaning. She would identify the source of the problem and find solutions to allow the athlete to be fully expressed. In other words, discover and get rid of the reasons for the deadlock." Drouard, J."*...in high-level sport, the psychological component also plays a fundamental role in the ability of the athlete to invest in training, to express all his talent in competition, and to bounce back in the face of the difficulties encountered, or even chess."* Debois, n. (2008) *"Mental preparation covers the use by the athlete, to the approach of the competition, anxiety control and strengthening of motor efficiency..."* . *«She offers a set of*

techniques that an athlete learns and applies in two objectives: maintain the effectiveness of the gesture in a competitive situation and to shield against stress-generating influences.» Lee, M. cited by Bacquaert, P. (2013) the object of mental preparation for the performance is to allow the subject to control his thoughts, his attitudes, his actions, in order to optimize them. Knowing that muscle strength can be improved by training, mental strength can also be developed by some methods. She uses to do this techniques and tools, for the most part, imported from Anglo-Saxon countries. The most frequently used tools and techniques are relaxation, mental imaging, and cognitive techniques of mind control. *"In the North American model, the difference of the two approaches is more clear, and it is governed by scientific societies."* (Bacquaert, P. 2013) North American operation, sports psychology, differentiates the clinician (the psychologist) of the consultant (the mental trainer) Weinberg, RH and Gould, d. (1995)

3. Perception of mental preparation for athletes and coaches

Increasingly, high-level athletes integrate mental preparation as part of their overall preparation (physical, physiological, tactical, technical, nutritional) because everyone now agrees to say that physical and technical value equivalent, a mental high-level differentiates simple sportsman champion. However, it is difficult to assess the share of the "mind" in the performance, but she is often prominent. Minuet, J. J. (2009). Without confidence, performance is a utopia for Arthur Ashe, professional American, tennis player in the 1970s, *"one of the keys to success is self-confidence. One of the keys to confidence is preparation"*. In a study carried out in 1988, by Terry Orlick at the University of Ottawa and John Partington of Carleton University, on 235 Canadian Olympic athletes who participated in 1984 Olympic Games in Sarajevo and Los Angeles, it is stated that *"statistically significant relationships were found between the results of the Olympic performance and some mental skills"*. The footballer Marcel Dessailly goes in the same direction by claiming to *"know be a fighter and remain lucid at the same time, but also to get an extra pressure without being distressed."* It's a question of balance. The former tennis player, Boris Becker added: *"I think it's the mental aspect that is the essential part of tennis but people do not know."* To the Beijing Olympics in 2008, the Moroccan Hicham el Gerrouj, shows the mental strength and determination with which he is about to fight and win the trials of the 1,500 and 5,000 meters, saying: *"anyone who wants to beat me will have to come close to death... ».* *"The different actors of the sporting world are still faced with a profusion of stakeholders in the field of the psychology of sport and of the mental preparation, horizons and skills strong variety. The profession of "mental coach" cannot be improvised so! In 2003, the Insep had a psychiatrist and a social worker at disposal for 700 to 800 athletes. Here*

too, it seems clear that the will and the means made available appeared to be too low. "Drouard, J. (2010)

4. Characteristics and importance of mental preparation

Mental preparation allows the athlete to manage his stress, decrease fears *"the athlete warmed up mentally and physically will be more efficient, from the beginning of the effort."* Minuet, J.J. (2009). Indeed, stress is the first issue from a mental point of view, and is the first psychological factor limiting which subject is the competitor. It is fundamental to understand and learn to manage it. *"Stress is a nonspecific response of the body to any request that is made ' State manifested by a set of reactions of the organism is a psycho-physiological reaction of adaptability between a person, its features and a specific environment."* Selye, H. (1975). The main objective is the improvement of athletic performance during competitions, but also overcome the stress has the pressure exerted by the many related factors has the sport in general. Increase his will, *"recent research on the psychological mechanisms of the decision shows that the will to act is not what gives the impulse to action, but it comes at the level of its control, its orientation and its correction."* Proust, J. (2010). In psychology, the will is the ability to perform an intentional act, consciously. Develop self-confidence, as *« being loved, treated with respect and trust by his parents when you are young can help give a better start from the point of view of self-confidence."* Garneau, J. (1999).

The notion of self-confidence is very significant. She translates the belief that a subject has capabilities to adopt a behavior or success a sporting performance. Moreover, to stimulate the ability of concentration, by *"the Faculty of the mind to focus on an object: to use his abilities to observation, study, the judgment of a thing whatsoever, or to the practice of action.»* The attention is exclusive because you can really focus on an object at the same time, *"we can do two things at the same time if one requires no attention."* William James, ' also considered to be the father of Psychology American, gave the attention a definition become classic: attention is the taking of possession by the spirit, in clear and vivid form, of an object or a series of thoughts among several that appear to be possible [...]» It involves the removal of some items in order to deal more effectively with others. ', attention or 'concentration is something fragile, temperamental and especially very difficult to define. *"The concentration is above all the ability to stay in the present, that is of not to be overwhelmed by the images and thoughts of the past or the future."* Black, M. (2010) Finally, search for *"how maintain and develop best suited to sports performance motivational attitudes is one of the aspects of mental preparation."* Among the attitudes and behaviors observed in a sportsman during workouts or in competition, there are the above characteristics and which manifest through reactions to stimuli (indoor and outdoor) and other factors or strategies that have purpose to help him overcome these

unfavorable situations and we, quote in particular, intrinsic motivation, which represents the highest degree of self-determined motivation and refers to situations in which the individual freely engages in the activities for the pleasure they provide, the challenges and learning opportunities they generate.

Has the reverse, *"extrinsic motivation refers to situations where the individual engages in an activity for its consequences more than for the activity itself, either in order to get a reward or avoid punishment."* Vallerand, R. J., & Grouzet, F.M.E. (2001). *"Motivation helps to explain the dynamics of human behavior. There are few psychological phenomena that elude."* Fenouillet, F. (2012). In 1992, Carron and Spink showed *"there a more obvious membership in a physical activity program improves the cohesion of the group."* The appeal of the group, the desire to participate and interactions interpersonal with other members of the group as well as the benefit that a member may withdraw from its association with the group, are the motivating factors.

5. The approach and methods in mental preparation

"There is no consensus on the approach to mental preparation. The multitude of stakeholders from backgrounds, training and various obediences, in addition to the youth of the discipline, do not allow to establish a Protocol and a consensual approach." Bacquaert, P. (2013). The approach set afterwards is just one approach among many others but it is the fruit of experience and the exchange of different stakeholders in the field, and the will to include the psychological preparation in a rigorous and scientific context. This approach is designed to optimize performance while preserving the health and emotional balance of the athlete. There are varieties of techniques related to the psychological preparation sportsmen, but certain methods, are unanimously recognized and used in the field as the observation, clinical interviews, procurement skills questionnaires and tests. The observation of the athlete allows us to assess its potential, to situate his level and set targets to achieve. Observation, made by stakeholders, among sportsmen in order to observe and analyze, the behaviour of the player in the game of competition, and meet its adapted and unadapted lines at matches. Observations will be used subsequently, of referring to quantify the progress made by the player. *"If the number of tests in psychology and mental preparation is bloated, few have a validity and fidelity that make their relevant uses. They allow the comparison of individuals."* Bacquaert, P. (2013).

6. Problem and hypothesis

In its work on mental preparation Dr. Patrick Bacquaert, accurate that it is to translate not only the importance, but also , the effectiveness of this form of intervention, on one aspect, which is moreover very sensitive humans. *"It comes to the mind of the individual; the psychological dimension is a true factor of performance, maybe even one of the most important."* III, M. (2013). Therefore, we are interested in our study, this component, relative to the psychological variables that differentiate individuals between them and to, what distinguishes the champions of other normal individuals: differential psychology. And we wondered what the mental preparation is so important in the achievement of sport performance? How to measure its effectiveness and what is his approach?

The intervention of the psychologist using descriptive language complete observation carried out upstream, and a goal of trying to understand correctly expressed, through its actions, emotions and attitudes in a stressful environment and in its 'moments of great solitude.' In other words, try to attribute to this mental factor discriminating quality coveted by the athlete and her coach. Durand, M. (1987), has studied this aspect, "based on the differences between individuals in the realization of the tasks. It highlights the characteristics stable and personal subjects. It is the differential psychology. We develop the question in two points, namely, the importance of mental preparation and the methods as to its effectiveness in improving the performance. We have formulated the following hypothesis:

Mental preparation carried out by trained practitioners, with seasoned methods may be as a fundamental factor in improving performance.

7. Method

This kind of investigation is usually linked to the word of the subject, often tainted affirmation of non so-called of pretexting, (to not be discredited) and where it is difficult to know the true meaning of the word, or the idea that asked. *"It comes to consider non-not people, but points of view"* Goffman, E. (1977). We preferred maintenance on the basis of a questionnaire for athletes and an inventory of the mental characteristics by coaches, who, we submitted an assessment table. Our investigation focused on 30 athletes, their age varies between 15 and 23 years, their sporting experience is important, since they operate at national level clubs (08 of them have been selected) they were champions, either at the regional, national and/or international level. Our second sample consists of 20 coaches, experts in their disciplines, levels and high training (PhD, Magisterium,

consultants). The goal is to discover the true meaning of mental preparation and his real or supposed influence in high-level sport.

7.1 Tools and data collection Protocol

Two different tools were used for collection data, namely interview with athletes on the basis of a questionnaire (assembled and formed from the questionnaire on the evaluation of the mental strategies of Nadine Debois). A table for coaches, to assess, using a rating system the various concepts identified in the specific literature and which relate to the psychological preparation. Procurement of the questionnaires and the interviews took place in different places, and places where exercise interviewees (stadiums, institutions) researchers have used mainly specific questionnaires. Athletes and coaches data collected between February and September of the year 2014.

8. Results

8.1 Questionnaire

A. Do you know what the psychological or mental preparation is?

NO.	Answers	Number	%
1	Yes, I know what is the mental preparation	06	20%
2	No, I don't know	21	70%
3	Unanswered	03	10%

Table 1: Definition of psychological preparation

B. In the psychological or mental preparation, we speak about:

NO.	Answers	Number	%
1	Bonuses, rewards, the opponent	15	50%
2	How to beat stress, fear	6	20%
3	How to improve its performance	3	10%
4	Increase the will	9	20%

Table 2: Content of psychological or mental preparation

C. Where psychological preparation is done?

NO.	Answers	Number	%
1	In the locker room	24	80%
2	On the ground	03	10%
3	In a room	03	10%

Table 3: The place where psychological preparation is done

D. Psychological preparation is essential for an athlete:

NO.	Answers	Number	%
1	Yes, it is.	03	10%
2	Does not know	03	10%
3	No, it is not	24	80%

Table 4: The importance of psychological preparation

E. Did you prepare psychologically before every competition?

NO.	Answers	Number	%
1	Yes, with my coach	20	67%
2	No, all alone	06	20%
3	With another speaker	04	13%

Table 5: Regularity of Psychological preparation

F. What are the points you'd like to improve on the mental plane?

NO.	Answers	Number	%
1	More willpower and determination	06	20%
2	To overcome the stress, fear have self-confidence	21	70%
3	Focus, apply, be attentive	03	10%

Table 6: Features to improve on the mental plane

G. What are the techniques you use, alone or with your coach to get ready?

NO.	Answers	Number	%
1	Relaxation	06	20%
2	The massage	21	70%
3	The mental rehearsal	03	10%

Table 7: Techniques of Psychological preparation

H. Synthesis

NO.	Questions	Answers	No.	%
1	Do you know what the psychological or mental preparation is?	No, I not know n	21	70%
2	In the psychological or mental preparation, we speak:	Bonuses, rewards, the opponent	15	50%
3	The psychological preparation is carried out	In the locker room	24	80%
4	Think-the psychological preparation is essential for an athlete.	No, it is not	24	80%
5	Do you prepare psychologically before every competition?	Yes, with my coach	20	66.66%
6	What are the points you'd like to improve on the mental plane?	To overcome the Stress, fear Have self-confidence	21	70%
7	What are the techniques you use to prepare?	The massage	21	70%

Table 8: Definition and importance of mental preparation

I. Assessment characteristics by coaches

NO.	Features	Total	Moy	E T	Min	Max
1	Self-confidence	113	5.65	1.18	4	7
2	Will	128	6.40	0.68	5	7
3	Relaxation	100	5.00	1.84	1	7
4	Ability to activate	89	4.45	1.32	1	6
5	Attention	109	5.45	1.32	2	7
6	Mental rehearsal	111	5.55	1.50	2	7
7	Self-esteem	91	4.78	1.93	2	7
8	Goal setting	115	5.75	1.48	1	7
9	Emotional control	83	4.15	1.73	1	7
10	Stress management	107	5.35	1.39	3	7
11	Perseverance	117	5.85	1.09	4	7
12	Motivation	125	6.25	0.79	5	7
13	Internal speech	69	3.45	1.61	1	6

Table 9: Statistical analysis

J. Classification of characteristics

NO.	Features	Total	Moy
1	Will	128	6.40
2	Motivation	125	6.25
3	Perseverance	117	5.85
4	Self-confidence	113	5.65
5	Attention	109	5.45
6	Stress management	107	5.35
7	Emotional control	83	4.15

Table 10: Coaches' evaluation

9. Discussion

In the first part of the study, we tried to identify the contours of mental preparation through the questionnaire offered to the athletes themselves. Results show that 80% of surveyed athletes do not know to define what the psychological or mental preparation is. For half of the sportsmen in mental preparation sessions, it is question of material incentives (bonuses, rewards) for the remainder (20%) of them, we talk about stress of fear, (20%) of the will and (10%) to improve its performance. Psychological preparation takes place, usually, in the locker room (80%), in the,(10%) field or in a room (10%). 80% of athletes do not know, if it is more or less important than other performance factors. Two-thirds (66%) athletes say to prepare with their coach, but with regard to the search for a solution to problems encountered during the competition, athletes looking to

overcome the stress and the pressure exerted on them by their environment. Finally, for which are the methods and tools, only massage (70%) has a real meaning for them, having only a vague idea of the other techniques. The second part of the study evaluates the mechanisms underlying the relationship between the mind and performance. The results highlight the fact that coaches take advantage of their experience, allowing them to enjoy the features of mental preparation, thereby facilitating its understanding by novices. The results of the evaluation show that coaches, choose as in first will (128pts, and average 6.40) that *"is the ability to perform an act intentional"* but also the favour to freely determine its actions based on rational grounds." The motivation comes in second position (125 pts, 6, 25my) is free commitment of the individual in an activity for fun and sometimes for generated consequences. Perseverance, comes in third position (117, pts and average 5,85) it translates at the sportsman, by searching for consistency « remain firm in a way or act, just then the confidence in itself, (113pts, 5.65 my) followed by attention (109pts, my 5.45) management stress (107 pts my 5.35) and finally the emotional control with 83 pts for average 4.15.

10. Conclusion

We have, from a question that asked, what mental preparation is so important in the achievement of athletic performance, sought to measure its effectiveness and to know the techniques used in the field. And to do this we hypothesized that a mental preparation led by trained practitioners, with experienced methods can prove as a fundamental factor in improving the performance. To review and assess the situation we've raised and according to reactions in athletes, stating issues, on the one hand, and on the other hand, exhorting the experts by means of a survey. The data does not support our hypothesis. Thus, are confirmed, gaps that have perceived from the outset, in the literature and our preliminary readings, have us reassure as to the existence of significant controversy on the question of the link between the mental and athletic performance. *So many works are attached to understanding the concept of mental preparation in the field of sport psychology, research related to its influence on athletic performance are more rare. It would therefore be appropriate to confront different theories to practical applications in terms of education and training.* And among the lessons that we can learn from this research, everything first, the multitude of terms used by different researchers to treat psychological and mental processes (psychologist, mental trainer, coach) do not facilitate nor theoretical confrontation nor permits to give a real meanings to the action on the ground. Accommodation of specific terms, definitions and concepts is so essential to bring the different theories. There are several causes explaining the

ignorance of this sensitive issue by the interviewed athletes. First, the lack of training and information relating to the psychological preparation in sporting circles. Then, there's little interest granted by the persons responsible themselves (Department, federations, associations, experts) to the profession and the profession of mental trainer and psychologist in sports clubs (no club says, thinking, one day to recruit a specialist of this discipline). Finally, the main motivations have, thus, a direct link with the sporting result that most often is, in the eyes of the leaders, linked to the physical preparation and technical tactical which belongs to the coach. This representation is affected by a 'culture' of the immediate outcome, because the evolution of the sport is closely linked to the way of thinking and meets various resistances in Algeria. And it is due or cause many uncertain practices and these 'more than doubtful stakeholders' that few actors, sports world don't, know what that the concept of sport psychology means, and too often assign a simplistic and reductive definition, confining in a meeting of "*instructions to before match*". A reflection is necessary, then, to search for a true meaning and a perfect balance between the real impact, its effects and the many stakeholders in the field of mind.

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